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## ETHNO-NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN SOVIET AZERBAIJAN

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### Introduction

An Empire in decline is never a pretty sight. Its rulers indecisive, its institutions diminished and ridiculed, its legitimacy no longer self-evident, its power no longer feared: such a power becomes a danger to itself and the world within which it lives. As the sequels to the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires reveal such implosions occasion disorder and violence of an intensity to obscure whatever hopes attended their destruction. Might not this apply to Gorbachev's Soviet Union, the "Sick Man" of Eurasia?<sup>1</sup> Or, is it that the USSR is a superpower in transition, a potentially dynamic international force capable of overcoming its maladies and divisions?<sup>2</sup> The Soviet future is dim and uncertain. All that may be safely said is that there can be no going back; powerful forces have been unleashed, ones which may deliver the USSR from its predicament or ensure its demise. Nowhere is this better symbolised than by the explosion of ethnic nationalist, and religious movements which have surfaced over the past several years. "Passions", Mikhail Gorbachev conceded, "are now running out of control".<sup>3</sup> Ethnonationalism has indeed resurfaced in the USSR.

About this there should be little surprise. Yet, Sovietologists are not alone in their underestimation of the "subnational" level of analysis. Indeed, the changes in the Soviet Union pose a challenge equally to students of international relations. At first

sight, no incompatibility would seem to exist between the discipline of International Relations and the phenomenon of ethnic nationalism. After all, many of the more intractable and sanguine problems in world politics have ethnonationalism as their essence, from Northern Ireland to Ethiopia, from Israel to Canada.

Yet, ethnonationalism remains a factor with which the discipline has not adequately come to terms. This is not an arbitrary lapse but rather a systematic bias, the result of a combination of intellectual prejudices. There has, first, been a central focus on the "nation-state" as the primary actor in world politics. Such a tendency is associated with Realist Theory much as it was with the early developmental speculations regarding "nation-building".<sup>4</sup> There has been, secondly, an equally intense focus on the "international level" of analysis emphasizing regional integration, world society, and international organizations. This has been the predilection of the pluralist theorists.<sup>5</sup> One may point, thirdly, to the influence of globalist or Marxian theories which posit a vision of transcending concepts of class and competition among socio-economic systems.<sup>6</sup> All of these perspectives share an analytical bias against the subnational forces of ethnicity and religion. But, this bias was in many ways inevitable. It merely reflected the general tendencies of modern Western thought: secular and melioristic; focused on commonalities rather than differences; integration rather than fragmentation, cooperation rather than conflict and, above all, on the power of transcending idea-systems and loyalties over "traditional" or "narrow" ones.

A price was paid for this prejudice as the West watched, in powerless amazement, the ethnic and religious resurgence of the late 1970s and 1980s. And, now as the Twentieth Century nears its end one may observe not, as earlier assumed, the realization of universal comity informed by enlightened secular values but instead a spectacle of religious intolerance and ethnonationalist conflict. A more profound shock to the modernist sensibility could not have been imagined.

It is the purpose of this essay to examine the reemergence of ethnonationalism in the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan with specific emphasis on the affect it may have on international politics. This shall entail first an historical overview of Azerbaijan, a discussion of its emergent "civil society" as well as its "conflict society", followed by some observations regarding the connections between Azerbaijani ethnonationalism and internationalism.

## **The Historical Evolution of Azerbaijan**



"It is," Abulfaz Aliiev of the Azerbaijani Popular Front asserted, "only a matter of time until Azerbaijan becomes an independent country."<sup>7</sup> This view, while by no means the dominant one in the Republic goes, nevertheless, to the heart of the matter. What are the potentials for the rise of Azeri ethnonationalism and to what extent will it involve a move toward secession? A brief examination of the history of this troubled area reveals the problematic nature of this undertaking.

Azerbaijan, the "land of fires", denotes a region surrounded to the north by the Caucas Mountains, to the east by the Caspian Sea, to the West by the Armenian Highlands, and to the South, by Iran. It is an area of great geopolitical significance, a corridor between Orient and Occident.<sup>8</sup> Its location and oil wealth made it the site of invasions and the focus of Russian, Turkish, and Persian imperial rivalries.

Before the Russian conquests of the 19th Century, Azerbaijan was ruled by a variety of Khanates which presided over a deeply fragmented realm.<sup>9</sup> In no way did "traditional" Azeri society furnish a sense of "national identity".<sup>10</sup> Such notions arrived only as part of a phenomena felt across the Muslim world during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries: the impact of the West.<sup>11</sup> This was the central event in Azerbaijan's modern history. The triumph of the West meant the proliferation of its ideas. These ideas, secular and activist could not but be subversive to the traditional societies of the East, challenging conventions and introducing hitherto forbidden possibilities, specifically in the pursuit of temporal millenium through the agency of politics.<sup>12</sup>

Azerbaijan, thus, underwent its "national awakening" at this time, concomitant with a host of other groups: Armenians, Jews, Kurds, and Arabs. The search for an ideologically contrived identity involved several general currents of thought. One was Pan-Islamism or Islamic Modernism. This was a hybrid doctrine, an attempt by theorists such as Jamal Afghani to synthesize Islam with the Western ideological mode of thought.<sup>13</sup> A second was Pan Turkism or Turkish nationalism. Based on the notion of a collective Turkish identity, this doctrine was also a hybrid, a combination of Ottoman universalism and Western nationalism.<sup>14</sup> In these two viewpoints one may observe a critical tension between religious and ethnic appeals. Standing apart from these nominally "indigenous" orientations were a range of Western constructs from liberalism to social democracy.<sup>15</sup> These doctrines were most often associated with Azerbaijan's minorities: Armenians, Russians and Jews.<sup>16</sup>

This doctrinal diversity existed during that critical period between the decline of the Russian Empire and the consolidation

of Leninism. It was in the first eruption of Azeri "Civil Society", when nascent expressions of an Azerbaijani identity were made explicit through resistance to Russian authority, violence against the Armenian community, the appeals for sponsorship to the Great Powers and finally in the creation, in 1918, of the independent Azerbaijani Democratic Republic.<sup>17</sup> For two years the Azeris were and ethnic group, a nation, with a state, replet with a postage stamp, a flag, and diplomatic missions. Yet, it was a polity living on borrowed time. In 1920, the Bolsheviks moved to end the Republic and bring it once again under Moscow's control.

"From today", Lenin told the non-Russians of the new USSR, "your beliefs and customs and your national and cultural institutions are declared free and inviolate."<sup>18</sup> Lenin's emphasis on national self-determination reflected his desire to, at once, destroy the Russian Empire and gain the fealty of the vast non Russian population.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, however, the logic of Leninism with its emphasis on class rather than national loyalties ran counter to the logic of ethnonationalism.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Azerbaijan's strategic location and oil wealth had, for Lenin, as it had for the Czars, the logic of Realpolitik. Thus, it was that in 1920 Lenin dispatched the troops to take Baku.

The totalitarian implications of Lenin's polity had their grim enactment during the long Stalinist era. Azerbaijan was subject to the purges, terror, and genocide familiar to other regions as well as to the systematic attempt to erase any sense of ethnic and religious distinctiveness.<sup>21</sup> The violence abated under Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Azerbaijan was subject to "socialist development," the tangible result of which was the proliferation of local mafias as the terror-polity turned increasingly into, simply, a corrupt one.<sup>22</sup>

Gorbachev has inherited this dubious legacy. By the time of his accession in 1985, it was evident that seven decades of Sovietism had not produced a socialist arcadia, an integrated state, a "new man" but, rather, intense ethnonationalist and religious resentment. Today, every corner of the USSR is animated by ethnic, nationalist and religious restlessness.<sup>23</sup> Nowhere has this tendency assumed more violent dimensions than in Azerbaijan.<sup>24</sup> The salient events there are well known: a conflict between Azeris and Armenians over disputed territory initiated a cycle of violence which involved pogroms and population transfers. Demonstrations occurred along the Iranian border with calls for "Greater Azerbaijan", widespread fighting in Azerbaijan and Armenia erupted resulting in the dispatch of Soviet troops to Baku which, in turn, instigated conflict in which both Azeris and Armenians were against Soviet authorities. By 1990 much of Azerbaijan had



reached the point of anarchy, representing for the USSR the greatest secession threat since 1918.

## **The Return of Azerbaijani Civil Society?**

Whither Azerbaijan? It is not inevitable that a polity characterized by internal fragmentation or subject to arbitrary boundary division by stronger powers should become prey to violent ethnonationalism or intemperate irredentism. Such conditions are known to states the world over. It is when these cleavages and divisions are politicized and made the basis of ideology, that tension and conflict become likely. Is a viable civil society, that constellation of human relationships standing between the individual and the state, one which could serve, in conjunction with a disinterested form of rule, to put a break in ethnonationalist distemper likely to emerge in a post-Leninist Azerbaijan?

There are few grounds for optimism. A stable civil society was unknown to the three historical legacies central to the political culture of modern Azerbaijan. The first was Islamic.<sup>25</sup> Although tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities was an established principle of Ottoman rule, the traditional Islamic polity is, nevertheless, one which admits no independent, secular, society to exist. Only two political classes were recognized: ruler and ruled.<sup>26</sup> The second was that of the Russian Empire. Here one may observe a case in which the state was stronger than the society, obviating until its last years the emergence of a civil society.<sup>27</sup> As it happened, however, this was eclipsed by Leninism, Azerbaijan's third great legacy. In the Leninist polity the society is dominated not only by the state, but by an ideologically defined party.<sup>28</sup> The civil society emerging today in Azerbaijan has to work against this pedigree of intolerance, which affords Azeris little preparation for the management of ethnic, national and religious passions which characterize this fragmented region.

The divisions are indeed pronounced. Religiously, Azerbaijan is divided between Muslims, who constitute the vast majority, and other groups, notably Christians and Jews.<sup>29</sup> The Muslims are, in turn, split between the majoritarian Shi'i and the Sunnis as well as by various Sufist orders. While no absolute correlation exists between sectarian affiliation and ideological conviction, it would seem that the Shi'i reflect the traditionalist or populist Islamic orientation while the Sunnis have been particularly receptive to Turkish nationalism.<sup>30</sup> Ethnically, Azerbaijan is host to a myriad of groups: Turks, Persians, Kurds, Armenians, Jews, Georgians and others.<sup>31</sup> Tensions between the Turkish Azeris who represent the majority and such rivals as the Armeni-

ans whose numbers exist in large Azeri cities have often escalated to physical violence. Divisions exist also between urban and rural Azeris, modernized and traditional groups as well as between tribes and kinship groups.

As in the Middle East several levels of loyalty identification have vied for influence throughout the modern history of Azerbaijan. The first may be termed universalism, a "horizontal" loyalty focus, predicated on a transcending concept of religion or ethnicity.<sup>32</sup> Such a perspective is aloof to concerns for national boundaries and therefore runs counter to the logic of the modern state system. Though it has, in its many variants, enjoyed wide subscription, it has met with few tangible achievements. The second is nationalism, a "vertical" loyalty pattern based on a sense of distinct national identity.<sup>33</sup> This has, of course, been the predominant force in recent and contemporary International Relations. But, for those "nationalities" bereft of a state this nationalism represents a revolutionary force. It is presumably in this nationalist form that Azerbaijan's threat to secede from the USSR is the greatest. Yet, the prospects for this are undermined by the third level, that of "particularism".<sup>34</sup> This may be defined variously as subnationalism, tribalism religious or ethnic nationalism. Here, the basic sense of identity is defined very narrowly, whereby the interests of, for example, the tribe or clan are seen as paramount to national or universalist concerns.<sup>35</sup> It has been the case in several states, notably Iraq and Ethiopia, that members of small constituencies manage to assume power and seek to identify the state with their sect and orientation. Which tendency prevails currently in Azerbaijan is as yet unclear. One may only say that no consensus has been reached. Therefore, expectations of a coherent Azeri national assertion with a view toward secession should be tempered by an appreciation of the powerful subnational forces loose in Azerbaijan. All of these tendencies compete in a profoundly different political environment from what had obtained only a few years ago.

One may identify several phases to the creation of this new political environment in Azerbaijan. Beginning in 1988 calls for greater cultural autonomy emerged.<sup>36</sup> This could have been viewed as a rejection of Russification and Sovietization. It could also have been seen as the initiation of a new political discourse, taking the form, initially, of renewed interest in Azeri literature, linguistic matters, hitherto forbidden historiographic debates, and greater freedom in Islamic activities.<sup>37</sup> In the next stage, evident in 1989, demands were heard for economic and political autonomy.<sup>38</sup> A sense of inequity, a feeling that the economic relations between Moscow and Baku were ostentatiously asymmetrical pervaded



Azeri oppositionist literature.<sup>39</sup> This notion of aggrievement extended also to the relations between Azeris and the Armenian and Russian minorities.<sup>40</sup> Protests were framed also in the idiom of environmentalism, reflecting the trend throughout the USSR.<sup>41</sup> Finally, by 1990 a new threshold had been achieved, the demand among some informal groups for national self determination.<sup>42</sup>

The existence of "informal" groups is, needless to say, quite foreign to Soviet history. The proliferation of these associations, estimated to number in the range of 30-60,000 represent a revolutionary development in domestic Soviet politics.<sup>43</sup> They reflect concomitantly the emergence of a nascent civil society, an embryonic multi-party system, and an instrument in Gorbachev's perestroika strategy.<sup>44</sup> In Azerbaijan a plethora of informal groups have emerged ranging from nationalist to environmentalist; Islamic to cultural.<sup>45</sup>

As the authority of the Republican Communist Party began to erode, the salient political force has become the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF).<sup>46</sup> It surfaced in 1988, the creation of liberal, secular, Baku intellectuals.<sup>47</sup> As its initial statements revealed it was a reformist informal organization entirely supportive of perestroika.<sup>48</sup> Its leaders renounced the use of force as a legitimate means of expression and declared the APF's fealty to the themes of humanism, democracy, pluralism, internationalism, and human rights.<sup>49</sup> "The goal of the PFA" one document reveals, "is legal government, a fully developed civil society and citizens enjoying all their rights and freedoms."<sup>50</sup> Most significantly there was no call for Azerbaijan's secession from the USSR.

However, by late 1989 it was evident that the APF had undergone fissions and radical transformations. This development cannot be viewed apart from the atmosphere of acute conflict atmosphere which prevailed during this period. Furthermore, the fragmentation and radicalization of the APF is entirely consistent with the developmental pattern of other such enterprises. Having begun their careers as moderate, reformist movements, groups such as the APF are liable to split into "moderate" and "radical" factions. It is, in short, likely that the APF now refers to a variety of ideological tendencies, ones which may harbour contempt for each other.<sup>51</sup>

For example one learns from Ebulfesz Aliiev, a leader of the APF, that the group's basic orientation is ethnic Turkism. "The objective," he states, "behind the establishment of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan is to secure full sovereignty and independence for Azerbaijan with a view to establishing the Turkish Republic of Democratic Azerbaijan."<sup>52</sup> This vision, Kemalist in nature does not, however, entail Azerbaijan's integration with Turkey. Ac-



cording to Aliiev: "Turkey's moral support will be enough for us."<sup>53</sup>

Others such as Gamid Kharishchi, an ideologue of the APF posits an Islamic vision. Rather than calling for secession, Kharishchi looks forward to the withdrawal of, for instance, the Balts, a move which would "intensify the Muslim influence in the Soviet Union."<sup>54</sup> "Yes," Khanshchi has stated, "there are elements of a jihad in our struggle."<sup>55</sup> His emphasis is on an Islamic resistance to the Soviet government raising the prospect that should the crunch come, support would be found in Iran, Turkey, and the entire Muslim world.<sup>56</sup> To these ideological divergencies may be added, no doubt, many others. Ultimately though, the direction taken by the APF and other groups will be determined not only by the evolution of Azeri Civil Society but also by its emerging "conflict society".

### **The Emergence of an Azerbaijani "Conflict Society"**

Has ethnonationalism in Azerbaijan reached a point of no return? Has the nascent and fragile civil society been eclipsed by one dominated by disturbance and conflict? The easing of Soviet control has set in motion powerful and unpredictable forces. Today Azerbaijan is host to the concomitant rise of ethnonationalist assertiveness and civil warfare, a combination which will have grave implications for the stability of the USSR and its southern neighbors.

One may identify several sources of the emerging Azerbaijani conflict society. The most conspicuous over the past several years has been the tension between Azeris and Armenians. This is an ancient animosity.<sup>57</sup> Spasms of violence between these communities punctuate the history of Transcaucasia. At one level it may be defined as a religious conflict among Muslim Azeris and Christian Armenians.<sup>58</sup> At another, it may be seen as a clash of two ethnic communities, made more pronounced by their having ideologized their identity in the form of nationalism. Here one encounters the great energizer of sub-nationalist agitation: the nationalist assertion that humanity is naturally divided into nations and each is entitled to the realization of territorial sovereignty.<sup>59</sup> Such doctrinal stridency can only exacerbate relations between groups making coexistence problematic as each is driven by ideology, to define the legitimacy of the state in terms of its ethnic or national identity. No doubt, the animosity felt between Azeris and Armenians has been manipulated by Soviet authorities.<sup>60</sup> As it happens, the Azeris have long considered the Armenians in their midst to be "collaborators" with Moscow and a

group which enjoyed a disproportionate measure of influence in Azerbaijan.<sup>61</sup>

The focus of the recent distemper between these communities has been over the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast [NKAO]. This is a densely populated mountainous enclave, demographically dominated by Armenians with a sizable Azeri minority.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, it rests geographically in the Azerbaijani SSR. During the 1920's, the decision was made by the Soviet rulers, to place the NKAO under the jurisdiction of Baku.<sup>63</sup> In so doing, the regime ensured that between the Armenians, who have never ceased demanding the return of the NKAO and the Azeris who jealously guard their constitutional claims, there would be a structural and self-perpetuating source of discord. This tension was masked during the long decades of Sovietism. But with the advent of perestroika and the return of civil society in the USSR the debate over the NKAO resurfaced with a vengeance.

The first move issued from Armenia. Armenian intellectuals were among the first to mobilize in the more relaxed Gorbachev era.<sup>64</sup> Almost immediately the NKAO issue moved to the forefront of the Armenian agenda. In 1988 a delegation of Armenian intellectuals met with Gorbachev and his associates in Moscow.<sup>65</sup> It was their hope that the Soviet authorities would agree to a change in the NKAO's status. Having initially been given encouragement in their pleadings, the Armenians moved boldly in mobilizing popular support for this initiative in the NKAO and throughout Armenia.<sup>66</sup> The Azeri reaction was immediate and violent. Armenians were attacked in the NKAO, Baku and in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait.<sup>67</sup>

Attempts to assign culpability seem pointless: the Armenians were playing with fire, provoking a predictable reaction. Analogically one may point to the agitations of the Zionists in Baghdad during the 1930's and 1940's and the Muslim, Arab response. As was the case with the Jews of Baghdad, the minority status of the Armenians in Azerbaijan meant that to pose a nationalist challenge to the majority was to illicit hostility albeit one given martial expression in vastly asymmetrical terms.<sup>68</sup> Caught in the crossfire of clashing nationalist messianisms the Armenians in Azerbaijan and the Azeris in Armenia were forced to take flight as intercommunal violence spread through the region.<sup>69</sup>

For its part, the Soviet authorities, declared finally that they would not look with favor upon the Armenian request. "The frontiers of Armenia and Azerbaijan," Alexandr Yakovlev averred, "are not to be touched."<sup>70</sup> However, the matter would not end there. Violent forces had been loosed upon the area, creating a



logic and momentum of their own.

From 1988 through 1990 the conflict intensified and spread out from the NKAO to prevade both Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Soviets attempted first to put the NKAO under its direct control then sacked local party cadres only to see their replacements identify themselves with Republican rather than Soviet loyalties.<sup>71</sup> During this period the APF instituted strikes and blockades on Armenia.<sup>72</sup> Both Azeri and Armenian armed groups roamed the cities and countryside.<sup>73</sup> Intercommunal tension had escalated to the point of civil war.

By 1990 the conflict environment was informed by an additional element as clashes developed between Soviet forces and Azeri irregulars.<sup>74</sup> In January 1990 numerous Azeris from the Nakhichevan demonstrated along the Soviet-Iranian border.<sup>75</sup> The demonstrators, many of whom evinced sympathy with Iran's Islamic Revolution demanded the ability to visit co-religionists across the Arax River in Iranian Azerbaijan.<sup>76</sup> A cardinal Soviet concern was exposed as calls were heard for the reunification of Azerbaijan and the creation of "Greater Azerbaijan".<sup>77</sup> For decades the USSR had attempted to exploit Azerbaijan's division in order to destabilize Iran.<sup>78</sup> Now, conceivably it is Iran's opportunity to reverse this pattern. To this prospect was added the tangible reality of the APF's assertiveness, one which culminated in its assumption of power in such towns as Lenkoran.<sup>79</sup> It was amid these developments that the Soviet authorities were provided the pretext to send in the troops.

The conflict is now a triangular one between Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Soviet forces. It has been argued that what obtains now are wars of "national liberation" as both Azeri and Armenian groups openly resist Soviet control.<sup>80</sup> Mention is made in this regard of the Armenian denunciation of the Soviet invasion of Baku.<sup>81</sup> Mention is made also of the secessionist activities underway in Nakhichevan, an Azeri enclave situated in Armenia.<sup>82</sup> Whether or not the axis of conflict has shifted from an inter ethnic one to an "anti-colonial" struggle, there may be no question that the disturbances in Azerbaijan are formidable. "Yes," a Soviet commentator reported to his Moscow audience, "one can say this is a real war."<sup>83</sup>

Dissent has, indeed, emerged in Moscow over what is seen as a "second Afghanistan."<sup>84</sup> The analogy is imperfect. Yet, as in Afghanistan, the war in Transcaucasia has involved an array of weapons and modes of engagement.<sup>85</sup> Questions have been raised regarding the sources of Azeri and Armenian weaponry.<sup>86</sup> Of course, it has also been speculated that the conflict is being manipulated and exaggerated by the Soviet authorities as an

element of Gorbachev's consolidation strategy.<sup>87</sup> All that may be safely said is that the conflict environment in Azerbaijan is extremely fluid. In such an atmosphere, masses which are disoriented, fearful and enraged may with equal probability lay passive or be stirred into violent frenzy on behalf of some Messianism, be it nationalist, ethnic, or religious.

The war in Azerbaijan throws into sharp relief a potentially new factor in Soviet domestic politics: the proliferation of revolutionary terrorism. There is about this possibility a great irony. Having for years been supportive of terrorism directed against the West, the USSR now stands vulnerable before this vexing form of political violence.<sup>88</sup> This vulnerability may be seen in several ways. There is first the dilemma of rising political expectations. These expectations increase as the totalitarian power structure withers. However, ambitions are ultimately frustrated by the dearth of sanctioned institutions by which they might be satisfied. Such a condition may prompt groups working against the system or toward its destruction to seek to do so through extra-legal means. As it happens, many of the new formations in the USSR are defined in terms of ethnonationalism, reflecting a second source of vulnerability; internal ethnic fragmentation.<sup>89</sup> Having failed to overcome these divisions the Soviet leadership has by its de-emphasis on Marxist-Leninism, removed the system's sole transcending, concept of legitimacy.<sup>90</sup> The USSR is now bereft of such an integrative vision. Upon what principle then may Moscow's hegemony over Baku or Tbilisi be justified? For the myriad of ethnonationalist groups emerging across the USSR the answer is by no means obvious. Many may resort to terrorist activity,<sup>91</sup> a trend symbolic of a third factor, the "radicalization dynamic". Quite rapidly a dichotomy could emerge within many of these groups, between "moderates" and "radicals", one which generally devolves into a division between "compromisers" and "purists".<sup>92</sup> Unable to out-promise, to speak in terms of absolutes, constrained by position or temperament, the moderate is frequently overwhelmed by the radical whose message, undiluted by nuance involves a devastating critique of the movement's "moderate leadership" and a compelling argument that through the agency of political violence the ideological vision may be realised. The sanguine histories of countless ethnonationalist associations the world over speak directly to this theme. And, to be sure, the radicalization of groups within the USSR may well put them in league with extra-regional terrorist organizations. It is this paradox of interdependence which represents a fourth vulnerability for the USSR. So central to Gorbachev's reform strategy, interdependence means opening the USSR to foreign influences



and interactions.<sup>93</sup> No doubt he would prefer selective interdependence. Yet, this is not a process susceptible to rigid control. It is one which may have the unintended consequence of permitting cooperation between terrorist organizations in the USSR and abroad.<sup>94</sup> Nowhere is the threat of such linkages more tangible than in Transcaucasia and Central Asia. Terrorism has indeed arrived in the Soviet Union, a factor which will vastly complicate the development of an Azeri civil society and contribute to the escalation of ethnonationalist violence in the region.

But, what are the prospects that Azerbaijan might actually secede from the USSR? Will the dynamics of these violent trends lead inevitably to the creation of an independent Azerbaijan? When all is said and done the answer is to be found not in Baku but in Moscow. The historical lesson of the de-colonization of Asia and Africa was not the efficacy or allure of national liberation movements but rather the equivocation, self doubt, and resignation in the metropole.<sup>95</sup> This and a revised conception of the USSR's national interest help explain the startling case with which the countries of Eastern Europe broke from Soviet domination.<sup>96</sup> An independent Azerbaijan would be the outcome of decisions taken by Gorbachev and his associates. Thus, the issue is purely one of speculation. Anything is possible: secession, autonomy, the status quo even protracted civil war and fragmentation.

## **The International Politics of Azerbaijan Ethnonationalism**

Who speaks for Baku? It can no longer be said that its fate, its relations with the outside world are determined exclusively by Soviet authorities.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, not since 1918 have stirrings in Azerbaijan had such direct implications for International Relations. The most immediate affects relate directly to the international position and credibility of the USSR. Here one may observe an intimate connection between subnationalist challenges and International Relations ramifications.

For the USSR, Azerbaijan's assertiveness symbolizes the general crisis of the Soviet system. The spectical of civil war in Transcaucasia must raise doubts regarding the stability and long term viability of the Soviet order. It must also underscore concerns that Gorbachev's revitalization strategy is plagued by insurmountable contradictions and must lead ultimately to ethnonationalist implosion. Such an interpretation, correct or spurious, cannot reflect beneficially on the USSR's international authority and credibility, the currency of world politics.

This credibility may be undermined in another fashion. It

is with some trepidation that much of the Muslim world views Gorbachev's reorientation of Soviet foreign policy. In one sense the USSR's "New Thinking" entails forging alliances with a vast international constituency on the basis of shared fealty to "global human values" and the dynamics of interdependence.<sup>98</sup> Yet, in another sense it means joining the USSR to the West creating a Western monolith from San Francisco to Vladivostok or a Common European Home. From the Muslim perspective this is a house without any Islamic wings. It is, moreover, seen as representing but another chapter in the long struggle between the realms of Christendom and Islam. It is reported that, alarmed at such a development, the Ayatollah Khomeyni once warned Gorbachev "not to fall into the embrace of the West."<sup>99</sup>

Iran has, to be sure, pointed to what it views as an asymmetrical Soviet and Western response to the concomitant crises in the Baltics and Transcaucasia. "You travelled to Lithuania to negotiate," an Iranian commentator said of Gorbachev's exertions, "but in Azerbaijan you simply issued the order for massacre."<sup>100</sup> For Iran and other forces in the Middle East, Soviet behavior in Azerbaijan and the muted Western reaction to these actions symbolized a conspiracy visited upon Azeri Muslims.<sup>101</sup> Regardless of the merits of such an interpretation, should the USSR be commonly identified as part of this Western conspiracy, colonizing and oppressing Muslims, new complications may attend its relations with remaining Third World radical regimes.

For its part Iran must view the rise of Azeri ethnonationalism with caution. Demands for the creation of a "Greater Azerbaijan" involving the Union of Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan represent challenge to Iran's territorial integrity.<sup>102</sup> Such a trend would also upset relations internally between ethnic Iranians and Azeris. Furthermore, it can only be with trepidation that Iran faces the prospect of a United Azerbaijan, 15 million strong, possessing a Caspian Seaboard and oil wealth, placed in its northern frontier. This possibility is made more menacing by the realization that such an entity might define itself not in terms of Shi'i fundamentalism but, rather, Turkish nationalism.<sup>103</sup> But, most immediately, the Iranian government faces the prospect that, in their conflict with Moscow, Soviet Azeris will take flight across the Iranian border in search of sanctuary thereby providing the Soviet authorities with a pretext for incursions into Iran.<sup>104</sup> As was seen in the Jordanian Crisis of 1970 the agitations of a subnationalist movement may result in interstate tension with both regional and international ramifications.

Despite such concerns the possibility may not be discounted that Iran will pursue an activist policy toward Soviet



Azerbaijan. It is the case that Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, Iran's Prime Minister declared that his government would not "align itself with those who advocate the disintegration of the USSR."<sup>105</sup> However, demands for a revolutionary approach have surfaced.<sup>106</sup> Although Iran's revolution has been delivered formidable blows at home and abroad it may yet serve as a source of cooperation, inspirational or tangible, for Muslim activists in Azerbaijan and Central Asia.<sup>107</sup> Iran's Islamic message represents a coherent alternative to the ideological and political ambiguity that now prevails in Azerbaijan.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, should Moscow's grip weaken Iran's interest in the future orientation towards Azerbaijan would undoubtedly be keen.

Turkey's interest would also be aroused. Historical ties, ethnic affinities, and concerns lest the Armenians become emboldened, have drawn Turkey back to the center of events in Transcaucasia.<sup>109</sup> The rise of Azeri ethnonationalism underscores a great opportunity for Turkey as it presents itself as the leader of the USSR's vast Turkic population. "In the near future," a Turkish official remarked, "we shall see the flags of Turkic governments in Russia."<sup>110</sup> The Turkish assertion is a formidable one, based on the appeal of Turkish nationalism and the vision of Turkey as a gateway to the West and a source of economic viability.<sup>111</sup> In this sense, Iran's Islamic vision of a post Soviet Azerbaijan is matched by a Turkish nationalist conception.

Could it be that somewhere a Turkish Sykes and Iranian Picot conspire to divide the spoils of the post Communist Transcaucasia and Central Asia? It is more likely that between Moscow, Ankara, and Tehran a tacit understanding exists that ethnonationalist irredentism is to be discouraged. Should this be the case the Azeris will join the Kurds and Armenians as nations without states, continuing sources of regional tension.

## Conclusion

What judgments may be made from this examination of Azerbaijan's resurgent ethnonationalism? Whether or not one views the disturbances in Azerbaijan as symbolic of the USSR's terminal crisis there can be no denying that powerful subnational forces have been unleashed, ones which may prove to be beyond the total control of central authorities despite the regime's pattern of violent crackdown on independence tendencies in Transcaucasia and the Baltics. Nevertheless, the history and political culture of Azerbaijan provides little basis for optimism that the Republic's post-Soviet experience will be stable and peaceful. Moreover, the depth of animosity between Azeris and Armenians is likely to

provide the region with an ongoing source of tension. This discord will most probably provide other Soviet Republics and neighboring states with opportunities to seek advantage. Transcaucasia is thus likely to remain a zone of international conflict, a theatre of subnational and interstate rivalry.

One might point also to conclusions of a more general nature. What is the relationship between ethnonationalism and International Relations? Despite the sound and fury associated with subnationalist movements world wide, it is the state which dominates the international system. The state has not always been paramount. Before the advent of the European state system, various aggregations prevailed. But since then, it has been the nation state which has endured and dominated: endured for fear that its sequel would be anarchy, dominated because of the alacrity with which it has destroyed its challengers, universalistic or particularistic.

It may be argued that those states that did not emerge out of this European tradition are the artificial contrivances of imperialism. To this it must be said that all states are artificial and contrived, all the outcome of violence and chance. But regardless of their pedigree or orientation, the modern nation state has betrayed a persistent intolerance toward sub-nationalist revisionism. During the century this intolerance has assumed a variety of expressions, from mild discrimination to genocide. Countries as disparate as Great Britain and India, Israel and Iraq, Spain and Nigeria are shown to be quite similar in their aversion to ethnonationalist irredentism. The actions of the Soviet authorities in the Baltics at the begining of 1991 suggest that the experience of the U.S.S.R. is consistent with the general pattern.

Ethnonationalism coexists uneasily with the state-system. At once it serves as a potential physical challenge for territory, a central factor in a state's internal and external affairs, a challenge to the legitimacy upon which a state may rest, and a force to be manipulated in one country's foreign policy toward another. It remains among the most powerful sources of disturbance to the international structure.

What of the "new world order" said to be arising out of the Cold War's demise? Hitherto most speculations on this question have had as their analytical point of departure the likelihood of a new international consensus expressed through novel forms of cooperation, resting on new forms of intellectual convergence and political integration.<sup>112</sup> Gone, according to this view, are the great ideological conflicts and bloc antagonisms. Now, the advocates of a Lockean new world order assert, a system of order and comity is at last within sight. But could not Azerbaijan's recent experi-



ence suggest that to entertain such melioristic notions is to invest in the process of political change unwarranted hopes and expectations? Is it, perhaps, not more prudent to suppose that great changes, however desirable, must, as a matter of course, occasion new and unforeseen disturbances as groups continue as they always have to seek influence, power, advantage, and to sustain differences among themselves?

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For this view see "Z". "To the Stalin Mausoleum" Daedalus (Winter 1990) pp. 295-344. Brzezinski, Z. The Grand Failure — The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989.)

<sup>2</sup>See Hough, J. "Gorbachev's Endgame" World Policy Journal. (V. 7, No. 4), Fall 1990, pp. 639-702.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted in Radio Liberty [RL]. (20 July, 1988), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>On Realism see Viotti, P. and M. Kauppi International Relations Theory. (New York: MacMillan, 1987), pp. 32-167.

<sup>5</sup>On Pluralism see *Ibid.*, pp. 192-379.

<sup>6</sup>On Globalism see *Ibid.*, pp. 399-423.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted in MacLeans. (October 30, 1989), p. 43.

<sup>8</sup>On the historical context of this area see Swietochowski, T. Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 37-64.

<sup>12</sup>For a general treatment of this issue see Kedourie, E. ed. Nationalism in Asia and Africa. (New York: NAL, 1970).

<sup>13</sup>See Swietochowski, T. op. cit. pp. 23-36. Also see Kedourie, E. Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam. (London: Frank Cass, 1966).

<sup>14</sup>See Lewis, B. The Emergence of Modern Turkey. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

<sup>15</sup>See Swietochowski, T. op. cit., pp. 23-36.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 23-36.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 129-164.

<sup>18</sup>Quoted in Nahaylo, B. and V. Swoboda Soviet Disunion — A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR. (New York: The Free Press, 1990) p. 32.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup>See Connor, W. The National Question in Marxist-Leninist

Theory and Strategy. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984 ).

<sup>21</sup>On the purges see Conquest, R. The Great Terror — A Reassessment. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup>See Heller, M. and A. Nekrich Utopia in Power — The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present. (New York: Summit Books, 1986).

<sup>23</sup>See Lapidus, G. "Gorbachev's Nationalities Problem" Foreign Affairs. (Spring 1990) pp. 92-108. Suny, R. G. "Nationalist and Ethnic Unrest in the Soviet Union" World Policy Journal. (Summer 1989) V. 6 No. 3, pp. 503-528. Alexeyeva, L. "Unrest in the Soviet Union" The Washington Quarterly, Winter 1990) pp. 63 - 77.

<sup>24</sup>See Suny, R. G. "Transcaucasia: Cultural Cohesion and Ethnic Revival in a Multinational Society" in Hajda, L. and M. Beissinger The Nationalities Factor in Soviet Politics and Society. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990) pp. 228-53.

<sup>25</sup>See Swietochowski, T. op. cit. Lemerrier-Quelquejay, C. "Islam and Identity in Azerbaijan" Central Asian Survey. (V. 3 No. 2 ) 1984 pp. 29-55 .

<sup>26</sup>See Kedourie, E. "The Nation-State in the Middle East" The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations. 1987. (V. 9, No. 3) pp. 1-9 .

<sup>27</sup>See Besancon, A. The Rise of the Gulag: The Intellectual Origins of Leninism. (New York: Centinuum, 1981).

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. Also see Pipes, R. The Russian Revolution. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990) pp. 506-565.

<sup>29</sup>See Swietochowski, T. op. cit. pp. 8.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>31</sup>Swietochowski, T. op. cit. p. 7.

<sup>32</sup>See Haim, S., ed. Arab Nationalism: An Anthology. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) for examples of Pan-Arabism. Also see Hourani, A. Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age. 1798-1939. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Esposito, J. Islam and Politics. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984).

<sup>33</sup>See Kedourie, E. Nationalism. (London: Hutchenson, 1984).

<sup>34</sup>See Esman, M. and I. Rabinovich. The Study of Ethnic Politics in the Middle East. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

<sup>35</sup>See Schechterman, B. "Horn of Africa National Liberation Movements" Middle East Review. (V. 14 No. 1) Fall 1988 pp. 47-66.

<sup>36</sup>See Bohr, A. and Y. Aslan "Independent Azerbaijan, 1918 1920: Call to Reevaluate History of Former National State" RFE/RL. 18 August, 1988, pp. 1-2.



<sup>37</sup>See Aslan, Y. and E. Foller "Azerbaijani Intellectuals Express Concern over Native Language" Report on the USSR. (March 10, 1989) pp. 22-23. Aslan, Y. "Azerbaijan Intellectuals Discussed Legacy of Alphabet Reforms" Report on the USSR. (February 17, 1989) pp. 6-7. Aslan, Y. "Mosques Reopened in Azerbaijan" Report on the USSR. (February 10, 1989) pp. 16-17.

<sup>38</sup>See Foreign Broadcast Information - Soviet Series (FBIS- SOV) (8 September, 1989) pp. 32-3.

<sup>39</sup>See statements by Gamid Kherishchi translated in (FBIS-SOV) (25 January 1990) p. 53.

<sup>40</sup>See Fuller, E. "Gorbachev's Dilemma in Azerbaijan" Report on the USSR. 2 February 1990, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup>See Michaeli, M. and W. Reese. "The Popular Front in Azerbaijan and its Program" Report on the USSR. (August 25, 1989) p. 32.

<sup>42</sup>See remarks made by Ebulfaz Aliyev, translated in FBIS- SOV. (8 September 1989) p. 32.

<sup>43</sup>See Tolz, V. "Informal Groups and Soviet Politics in 1989" Report on the USSR. (24 November, 1989) pp. 4-7.

<sup>44</sup>See Goble, P. "Ethnic Politics in the USSR" Problems of Communism. (July-August, Vol. 38, No. 4, 1989) pp. 1-14.

<sup>45</sup>See Hunter, S. "Nationalist Movements in Soviet Asia" Current History. (October, 1990) pp. 325-328, 337-39.

<sup>46</sup>Altstadt, A. "The Azerbaijan Khalg Jebhesi (Azerbaijan People's Front)" Bulletin of the Association for the Advancement of Central Asian Studies. V. I22, N. 1 (Spring, 1990) pp. 5-7.

<sup>47</sup>See Michaeli, M. "Formation of Popular Front in Azerbaijan" RFE/RL. (9 December, 1988), pp. 1-2.

<sup>48</sup>See Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>49</sup>See Programme of the People's Front of Azerbaijan in Central Asia and Caucasus Chronicle (V. 8, N. 4) August, 1989, p.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>51</sup>On the Azerbaijani National Front see FBIS-SOV. 20 September, 1990, p. 89. On the Socialist Democratic Group see FBIS- SOV. 1 October, 1990, p. 86. Michaeli, M. and W. Reese. "The Birlik" Society in the Azerbaijani Democratic Movement" Report on the USSR. 1 September, 1989. pp. 30-31.

<sup>52</sup>See FBIS-SOV. 8 September, 1989, p. 32.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>54</sup>See FBIS-SOV. 25 January, 1990. p. 53.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>57</sup>See Swietochowski, T. op. cit. p. 39.

<sup>58</sup>See Suny, R.G. (1989) op. cit. p. 510.

<sup>59</sup>See Kedourie, E. Nationalism. op. cit.

- <sup>60</sup>See Hough, J. op. cit. p. 649.
- <sup>61</sup>See Swietochowski, T. op. cit. p. 38.
- <sup>62</sup>See Altstadt, A. "Nagorno-Karabagh - "Apple of Discord" in the Azerbaijan SSR" Central Asian Survey. (Vol. 7. No. 4., 1988). pp. 63-78.
- <sup>63</sup>See Ibid., pp. 63-78.
- <sup>64</sup>See Nahaylo, B. and V. Swoboda, op. cit., p. 284.
- <sup>65</sup>See Doder, D. and L. Bronson. Gorbachev — Heretic in the Kremlin. (New York: Viking, 1990) pp. 299-300.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 300.
- <sup>67</sup>Ibid. p. 301. See RFE/RL. 28 October 1988, p. 9. Fuller, E. "Armenian Claims on Nagorno-Karabakh: The Backlash in Azerbaijan" RFE/RL. 8 March 1988, pp. 1-3.
- <sup>68</sup>. See "Minorities" in Kedourie, E. The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1984), pp. 286-316.
- <sup>69</sup>See The Economist. (27 January 1990) pp. 47-8.
- <sup>70</sup>Quoted in RFE/RL. 7 July 1988, p. 4.
- <sup>71</sup>See The Economist. 29 January 1990, p. 47.
- <sup>72</sup>Fuller, E. "Nagorno-Karabakh and the Rail Blockade" Report on the USSR. 13 October, 1989, pp. 23-25.
- <sup>73</sup>See FBIS-SOV. 21 August, 1990, pp. 99-101.
- <sup>74</sup>See reports in The New York Times. 20 January 1990 and 21 January 1990.
- <sup>75</sup>See Clines, F. "Soviets Reinforce Iran Border Guard as Protests Grow" The New York Times. 4 January 1990, p. 1-7.
- <sup>76</sup>See FBIS-SOV. 10 January 1990, p. 69. FBIS-SOV. 8 January 1990, p. 61.
- <sup>77</sup>See "The Other Country with some Awkward Azeris" The Economist. 20 January 1990. pp. 43-44.
- <sup>78</sup>Nissman, D. The Soviet Union and Iranian Azerbaijan: The Use of Nationalism for Political Penetration. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).
- <sup>79</sup>See FBIS-SOV. 17 January 1990, p. 73 "Enter the Army" The Economist. (20 January 1990) p. 47.
- <sup>80</sup>See FBIS-SOV. 21 August 1990, p. 99-101.
- <sup>81</sup>See The New Republic. 12 February 1990, p. 11.
- <sup>82</sup>See FBIS-SOV. 22 January 1990, p. 91. FBIS-SOV. 23 January 1990, p. 6. FBIS-SOV. 24 January 1990, p. 59.
- <sup>83</sup>See FBIS-SOV 24 January 1990, p. 59.
- <sup>84</sup>On Soviet dissent see FBIS-SOV. 8 December 1989, p.96.
- <sup>85</sup>See FBIS-SOV. 21 August 1990, pp. 99-101.
- <sup>86</sup>See FBIS-SOV. 18 January 1990, p. 74.
- <sup>87</sup>See Hough, J. op. cit. p. 649.
- <sup>88</sup>See Schoenfeld, G. "Now Terror Stalks Soviet Streets" The



Washington Post. 3 December, 1989.

<sup>89</sup>See Suny, R. G. "Nationalist and Ethnic Unrest in the Soviet Union" World Policy Journal. op. cit., pp. 503-528.

<sup>90</sup>Saporluk, R. "The Imperial Legacy and the Soviet Nationalities Problem" in Hajda, L. and M. Beissinger op. cit., pp. 1-24.

<sup>91</sup>See Schoenfeld, G. op. cit. See Alexeyeva, L. "Unrest in the Soviet Union" The Washington Quarterly. (Winter, 1990) pp. 63-77.

<sup>92</sup>See Brinton, C. The Anatomy of Revolution. (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

<sup>93</sup>See Kubalkova, V. and A.A. Cruickshank Thinking New about Soviet "New Thinking". (Berkeley: University of California, 1989) pp. 55-8.

<sup>94</sup>This would constitute an example of "negative interdependence."

<sup>95</sup>See, for example, Kedourie, E. Islam in the Modern World (New York: A New Republic Books, 1980) pp. 213-232.

<sup>96</sup>For one interpretation see Lynch, A. "Does Gorbachev Matter Anymore" Foreign Affairs. (Summer 1990) pp. For a different perspective see Hough, J. "Gorbachev's Endgame" World Policy Journal. op. cit.

<sup>97</sup>See the example of Azeri-Armenian mediation efforts in Riga are appostic in this regard.

<sup>98</sup>See Kubalkova, V. and A. A. Cruickshank op. cit.

<sup>99</sup>See Foreign Broadcast Information Service Near East Series (FBIS-NES) 23 January 1990, p. 49.

<sup>100</sup>Quoted in FBIS-NES. 24 January 1990, p. 47.

<sup>101</sup>See FBIS-NES. 31 January 1990, p. 59.

<sup>102</sup>See The Economist. 20 January 1990, pp. 43-44.

<sup>103</sup>See Fuller E. "Will Azerbaijan be the Next Domino?" Report on the USSR. 12 January 1990, pp. 17-18.

<sup>104</sup>See The New York Times. 19 January 1990.

<sup>105</sup>Quoted in The Economist. 20 January 1990, p. 43.

<sup>106</sup>See FBIS-NE8. 7 February 1990, pp. 57-58.

<sup>107</sup>See The Economist. 20 January 1990, pp. 43-44. Also see Bohr, A. "Islam in the Soviet Union: Fertile Ground for Foreign Interference?" RFE/RL (2 February 1988) pp. 1-5.

<sup>108</sup>On the Islamic affinities the ideological convergencies implicit in the Iranian experience see the statements by the fundamentalist Hamas organization in FBIS-NES. 1 February 1990, p. 26.

<sup>109</sup>On the historical context of Turkey's involvement see Swietochowski, T. op. cit.

<sup>110</sup>Quoted in FBIS-NES. 13 February 1990, p. 58.

<sup>111</sup>On the economic aspects see FBIS-NES. 24 January 1990, p. 62.

<sup>112</sup>See, for example, Fukuyama, F. "The End of History?" The National Interest (Summer 1989).